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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (8/18): All talk and no action on launching a Palestinian national dialogue

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Main Stories:  
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All dailies highlight an Israeli Ma'ariv report on a document sent by Israel to the United States that outlines Israeli security requirements for any agreement on a Palestinian state. The demands include: first, complete disarmament of a Palestinian state; second, prohibition of military alliances between a Palestinian state and other countries; third, creation of an Israeli early warning system on mountains in the West Bank; fourth, Israeli military presence along the Jordan River and at crossing points; fifth, continuous Israeli air control; sixth, the right to move through the main traffic points in the West Bank at any time.

The decision of the Israeli government on August 17 to release 200 Palestinian prisoners headlines the front pages of the three dailies. The papers report the decision was taken during the weekly session of the Israeli Ministerial Council and is intended to show good will toward Palestinian Authority (PA) President, Mahmoud Abbas. According to Al-Quds, the Palestinian Premier, Dr. Salam Fayyad, stated this decision is not sufficient and that all Palestinian prisoners should be released. Official Spokesperson of the Palestinian Presidency, Dr. Nabil Abu Rudayna, confirmed in an interview with Agence France Presse that this is an Israeli step in the right direction but that he considers it insufficient. Al-Ayyam quotes the Palestinian Chief Negotiator, Dr. Sa'eb Erekat saying, "We principally welcome the release of any Palestinian prisoner."

The three dailies report on developments in Egyptian mediation between the Palestinian factions. Al-Quds reports that the Hamas leader, Izzat Al-Risheq, said in a statement to the press that Hamas did reply to the Egyptian letter sent to all Palestinian factions, and denied that Egypt had asked Hamas for guarantees to make the dialogue a success. He also confirmed that the disagreement

regarding security systems is not the only source of conflict between the Palestinian factions. In related coverage in Al-Ayyam, reliable sources said Palestinian factions denied news reports that Egypt had given up on sponsoring the Palestinian national dialogue. Member of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), Saleh Naser, said in an interview with Al-Ayyam that the leftist parties and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) will meet with members of Fatah in the Gaza Strip on August 20 to discuss issues previously discussed with Hamas leaders on the Palestinian national dialogue. Al-Ayyam also reports that the Palestinian Ambassador to Egypt, in an interview with Voice of Palestine Radio, confirmed Egypt wants to achieve Palestinian unity and praised the Egyptians efforts.

All dailies, citing international and Palestinian sources, report that U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will visit the region on August 25 to hold talks with the Israelis and the Palestinians to discuss developments in negotiations and Road Map implementation.

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Weekend stories  
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Sunday, August 17, 2008

The highly-anticipated meeting between Fayyad and Barak receives modest coverage in the Palestinian press, with Al-Quds and Al-Ayyam noting that the meeting constituted part of the "usual" but "sporadic" contact between both sides. Though Al-Quds front-pages a picture of both men shaking hands, none of the dailies leads with

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the story. Instead, both Al-Ayyam and Al-Hayat Al-Jadida run their main stories highlighting Fayyad's tour in the Hebron Governorate yesterday, quoting him as reiterating the Palestinian leadership's "commitment toward the Palestinian national constants" and the need for Israel to abide by its Roadmap obligations. As for the Fayyad-Barak meeting itself, the dailies cite a statement issued by the Fayyad office spotlighting Fayyad's demands that Israel must deal "seriously" with the prisoner issue, cease its raids into the West Bank, and commit to a comprehensive freeze of settlement activities.

Hamas's agreement with four Palestinian factions yesterday to "expedite the national dialogue" by approving the formation of a joint committee to put forth a unified vision to resume a promising inter-Palestinian dialogue is captured in all of the dailies' front-pages. Leading with the story, Al-Quds reports that the participants in the meeting, which included the PFLP, the DFLP, PIJ, and the Palestinian People's Party, as well as Hamas, issued a joint statement outlining the "consensus decisions" reached by the factions. These decisions include ending internal division, forming a national consensus government, rebuilding the security forces, reviving the PLC, and reforming the PLO. The same article quotes Fatah senior leader in Gaza, Zakaria Al-Agha, that Egypt will issue invitations to the Palestinian factions to meet in Cairo "very soon."

A reported improvement in relations between Jordan and Hamas is the theme of several articles, including a front-page story in Al-Quds stating that Amman intends to invite Hamas's Mishal for a visit to the Kingdom as a step to "open a new page" in relations between Jordan and Hamas.

Highlighting a report by its Washington correspondent, Al-Quds cites remarks by A/S Welch during his briefing in Washington on Iran two days ago that the goals set by the U.S. concerning the reaching of an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians have not changed. Welch is also reported as saying that there is a "political reference" in place for all issues, which is being worked on with PM Olmert despite his decision to step down next month. The same article reports that the Palestinian Chief Negotiator, Dr. Sa'eb Erekat met with Codels Jim Marshall and Chris Shays yesterday and qualified as "baseless" the recent Israeli press leaks on solutions reportedly proposed for the issues of borders, refugees and Jerusalem.

Saturday, August 16, 2008

The Fayyad-Barak meeting scheduled to take place today in Tel Aviv receives highlighted coverage in all dailies. The meeting will discuss political developments and the release of Palestinian prisoners, according to the reports. Running its lead story under the headline, "Intensifying Palestinian-Israeli Meetings on the Eve of Rice's Arrival," Al-Ayyam sees these bilateral meetings, including the one between Fayyad and Barak and another upcoming round of talks between the negotiating teams from both sides, headed by Qureia and Livni, as "preparations" for Secretary Rice's upcoming visit. The report notes that in addition to holding her usual separate meetings with Olmert and Abbas, the Secretary is expected to convene trilateral meetings, one with Fayyad and Barak, and another with Qureia and Livni. Al-Quds quotes Erekat that the Palestinian Authority reject's Israel's "test balloons" aimed at "shifting the blame" for any failure of future negotiations on the Palestinians. The article adds that the PA has communicated its

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position concerning these Israeli practices to foreign diplomats, including American Consul General Jake Wallles.

Israel's decision to postpone the evacuation of the largest unauthorized Jewish settlement near Ramallah receives front-page coverage in the dailies. Leading with the story, Al-Hayat Al-Jadida cites an AFP article that the Israeli Ministry of Defense has informed the High Court that the Migron settlers living on private Palestinian land will continue to stay there until a nearby settlement is built for them. In a separate front-page article, Al-Quds cites a UN report accusing Jewish settlers of escalating their attacks on Palestinian residents.

The weekly anti-wall protests by Palestinians and international peace activists in several Palestinian localities in the West Bank, including Al-Khader, Al-Ma'sara, Be'lin and Ne'lin, and the Israeli soldiers' "violent" crackdown against these demonstrators, receive above-the-fold reports juxtaposed with pictures of protestors arguing with soldiers. Several injuries and detentions, including the arrest of an Israeli photographer, are reported.

The Palestinian press continues to devote front-page attention to coverage of developments in the conflict in Georgia. Drawing attention to U.S. concern over the conflict, Al-Quds runs the story under a headline quoting President Bush warning Moscow against "bullying" its neighbors. A sub-headline of the same story quotes Secretary Rice demanding an immediate Russian pullout from Georgia.

The dailies front-page reports that two American soldiers have died in Iraq in the past two days. Other stories report that two NATO soldiers and four Afghani police were killed in Afghanistan last night during military operations.

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BLOCK QUOTES:  
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1. Independent Al-Quds prints its daily editorial entitled, "National Dialogue...Again" (8/18): "We are getting tired of calling for [Palestinian] national unity and we request that it be achieved as quickly as possible to end the division ... Everybody is talking about the national dialogue, its importance, and the necessity of achieving it, but nothing is taking place on the ground. On the contrary, we see an escalation in the division and the conflicts, mainly through mutual negative media campaigns and the politically-motivated mutual arrest campaign, targeting Hamas and Fatah supporters as well as leaders and cadres of Fatah in the Gaza Strip ... The DFLP and the PFLP met with Hamas and they agreed on the necessity of accelerating the comprehensive national dialogue in order to end the division and to regain unity ... So, what is the problem, why hasn't the dialogue started, why haven't we achieved national unity, and why don't we unite against the big challenges we are facing? And why haven't the Egyptian initiative and the other Arab initiatives succeeded in achieving an agreement despite the

sincerity of the Egyptian will and its efforts to start dialogue?... [Palestinian national] dialogue should start immediately and national unity must be achieved but it seems that no one is listening because...these people [Palestinian factions] are only good at hiding their true intentions by making eloquent speeches and statements. However, people will not give up on reiterating the call for dialogue and for the removal of the division and national gridlock."

12. Independent Al-Ayyam runs a daily editorial by Dr. Khaled

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Al-Hroub from Bir Zeit entitled, " Hamas and the Extension of President Abbas' Reign" (8/18): "...on the Palestinian [political] level and on the ground, things are getting worse. On the internal level, the internal division between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is increasing. And with each passing week that this division continues, its resolution is delayed by a month. Practically and on ground, the chances to reunite the homeland are difficult ... One of the upcoming crises which Palestinians are facing is the end of Abbas' reign on January 9, 2009. According to the Palestinian law, the Hamas Speaker of the PLC, Ahmad Bahar from Gaza, becomes President of the Palestinian Authority during the 60-day period allotted for presidential elections. Up till now, Hamas has insisted that it will refuse to recognize Abbas' presidential authority one day after his reign is over. What does this refusal mean, and what are the scenarios awaiting the Palestinians in the first month of the coming year? The first scenario, which is very optimistic, is that a miracle will happen and the national dialogue will succeed, resulting in the formation of a transitional or national unity government empowered to supervise the presidential elections in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and this way we will avoid the constitutional gap crisis. The second scenario is that things will remain as they are. Hamas will refuse to recognize Abbas as president, whereas the West Bank will make a legal decision to extend his presidential reign until the coming legislative elections. In this case, Hamas will reject this decision and will insist on the appointment of Ahmad Bahar as president. And since Bahar resides in Gaza and will remain there, and Hamas is under an international boycott, this means that the Palestinian division will develop to an 'advanced' stage which is: in addition to the presence of two separate governments, the Palestinians will have (while they are under occupation) two presidents. Of course Hamas will not be able to hold presidential elections in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip within 60 days, meaning that they will decide to extend the rule of the PLC Speaker. Then there will be no other option except to hold presidential elections in the Gaza Strip only. Regardless of the direction of the second scenario, it remains ambiguous and deepens the current division..."

WALLES